

# What Being a Father Means to Me

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I started thinking about Father's Day early in the month and what kind father I had. The things that made a father a father are light years from what fatherhood is now. We were raised like the TV show Leave it to Beaver. We credited our mothers for most of our growing up because our fathers were busy earning a living. That wasn't necessarily the case.

I have many childhood memories of things my father taught me. One time a neighbor came to see my dad. My brother, Don, and I sat on the porch listening to their conversation. The neighbor used a lot of cuss words when he talked to my dad. When he left, Dad called Don and I over and said, "Cussing doesn't make you a man. You can go through life without having to use that kind of language." I never once heard my father say a single cuss word.

Another time, Dad wanted to teach Don and I how to fish. He cut two willow poles and rigged them up with line, a sinker, and a hook. He gave each one of us our fishing pole, took out his old steel casting rod, and we learned how to put our first worm on the hook. We ran to the stream and started fishing. I remember well when Dad caught a trout. We said "Sure, you catch a fish because you have your fancy fishing rod." He took one of the willow poles from one of us and gave us his fishing pole. So we started fishing again and then Dad caught a trout on the willow pole. We said, "Sure, you got a fish because you get all the best fishing places." So, he let us fish every place we thought might have trout. We never caught a fish that day, but I'll never forget the patience he had with his two little sons. My father loved to tease us, so on the way home we asked why he caught a trout and we didn't. He replied, "Because you didn't hold your mouth right."

My dad's father died when he was eleven. In those days there was no welfare or programs for his mother raising three children. When he was supposed to start high school, he sold his books and told his mother he wanted to work to help her. They barely got by, but they stuck together as a family, and then moved to Pueblo. Dad did what he could to help his mother, and she became a Disciple of Christ minister in 1920. Later, he educated himself, married Mom, and went to work at the P.O.D. as a laborer sweeping floors. He worked up to management and was later transferred to the Pentagon, where he was in charge of the European, Asian, and U.S.A. Commands. His name is engraved in the Treasury Building for his outstanding work in the savings bond program for having 100% enrollment for the war effort.

In a bulletin from Park Hill Christian Church (on the east side of Pueblo) dated 1938, my Grandmother was the Minister, my uncle was an Elder, my father was a Deacon, and my mother was in charge of the nursery. I know I was there because I was seven months old.

My Dad did all right in his life. He helped guide us in our lives. He taught us boys that there is no reason to say "I can't." You never know unless you try. Maybe it was because he used that old saying from southwest Missouri "He held his mouth right!"

**...Tom Whaley**